

CREATING SENSITIVITY THROUGH REALITY SHOW: STUDY OF TELEVISION REALITY SHOW IN INDIA, *SATYAMEV JAYATE*

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ABSTRACT

In today's world where communication is fast changing and the various forms of communication are dwelling into the lives of the people. People have started increasingly depending upon television to look up for not only entertainment per say, but also as a means to satisfy their informative and affective needs. This study is an attempt to study the potential of media in forming perceptions of the people in order to gain insights into the impact the various television opinion leaders can potentially have in setting the images in the mindset of the audience using an example of a television reality show. The findings clearly reveal that television shows backed by sound research and clarity of message can act as potential change agents in modifying the perceptions of the audience and generating increased sensitivity towards various social discords.

KEYWORDS: Edutainment, Media, Opinion leaders, Reality Show

INTRODUCTION

Television was officially introduced in 1959 in India and now it has become the prime mode of entertainment. Indian television has made the transition from being an educational medium to being an exclusive entertainment based medium. Looking back into the history, the mandate of television in India was only to educate, spread information and to entertain people. In 1975, SITE (Satellite Instructional Television Experiment) can be called as the biggest achievement in the field of development communication to impart knowledge. In 1982, Asian Games were held in New Delhi which proved to give further impulse to the rapid expansion of the national television networks. When Indira Gandhi became the Prime Minister of India, a revolution of television took place.

During that era, *Doordarshan* (DD) was introduced which was owned and operated by the government (Kumar, 2010). The TV revolution did take place in 1984 when India's first soap opera was broadcasted on Doordarshan. TV programmes became so popular after the success of *Hum Log* and soap operas like *Buniyaad* and *Khandaan*. The sponsorship of indigenous soaps, advertising revenues and other serials provided spurt to production. Following the same soap opera format, religious epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* ended up in huge success on small screen.

At the end of 1990s, there were almost 58 million TV sets all over the country, along with 15 million connected to neighbourhood cable networks. There are different genres of television serials namely Television news, TV documentaries or features, interview programmes, games show or quiz programme, children's programme, music and dance, TV commercials, reality shows, talk shows, soap operas etc. Talk show are the shows which are been hosted by the famous celebrities or known person or an expert who introduces the topic to the audience and tries to invite people's opinion and experiences in life. The expert takes the lead in such talk shows and channelizes the topic and also tries to take the participation of people.

The genre of reality based shows is comprised of a variety of subgenres including game-doc, dating, docu-soaps, talent, reality sitcoms etc. while these subgenres provide viewers with "an immediate, voyeuristic, yet often playful look onto what might be called the entertaining real" (Murry, 2004). There are various reality game shows which are broadcasted on various channels like *Big Boss* (Sony), *Kaun Banega Carorepati* (Sony) and *Fear Factor* (Colors). Reality sitcoms include the humorous reality shows (Comedy Circus, Laughter Challenge). Docu-soaps show the documentary of the real people and real events. There are some court shows that feature real courtroom cases and the example is *Aap Ki Adaalat*, *Rakhi Ka Insaaf*.

The above mentioned subgenres have their own style of representation and treatment of the contentment which makes them different from each other (Sharma, 2010). Various studies on audience interactivity of reality based shows emphasised on the engagement of viewers with media such as internet to find more information about the content of the program. People watch for different reasons and have different needs satisfied through the watching of this genre of television. In his work, Holmes (2004) has argued that today, the influx of reality based television bridges the role of audience and producer, highly evident in programs such as *Big Boss* and *Sa Re Ga Ma Pa*.

While much of the literature talks about audience interactivity and states that it is closely related to perceived realism and character identification. Disposition theory uses this logic as a framework for predicting and understanding the reasons why audience experience different levels of enjoyment while watching entertainment programs with varying plot formats (Zillmann & Bryant, 1986). It is thought that enjoyment is maximised when liked characters have positive outcomes and disliked characters suffer from negative outcomes. Perceived realism has been conceptualized in a variety of ways within the mass communication literature. In general, audiences are thought to perceive media content as realistic, if they judge it to be like a real life in some meaningful way or if they response to it as it were real.

Audiences vary in their perceptions about the same content. The common forms of perceived realism are - Factual realism (whether what is portrayed has really happened), social realism (whether what is portrayed is like what one would expect to find in real world) and narrative realism (whether the events in a story are well explained or not). Media realism is often studied by communication researchers to find out its contribution to media effects. Reality show breaks the monotony and creates interesting concepts and innovation and therefore, catches the attention of the viewers. The basic idea of reality shows is to bring ordinary people of real life in limelight. The ordinary people participates in such shows rather than focusing on celebrities. By combining elements from the game show and documentary (fascination with real people), it has discovered that reality shows have a fresh way of linking TV into the present moment of its viewers. They offer us insight into what matters to everyday citizens.

The biggest examples of reality shows can be seen by the success of *Big Brother* in 1997. Reality shows have given the up close bondage factor to the people and the personal touch which has taken the Indian Entertainment by storm.

This genre was introduced since 2000 and till date the reality shows which have been imprinted in the heart of the people are KBC (*Kaun Banega Carorepati*), Big Boss and Indian Idol (Sharma, 2012).

Satyamev Jayate, a reality show was hosted by the famous Indian Bollywood actor Aamir Khan. The show co-produced by Aamir Khan and his wife Kiran Rao was directed by Satyajit Bhatkal and hosted by Amir Khan himself. It was telecasted simultaneously on Star Plus and on the national channel Doordarshan. As a reality talk-show it was aired on ten different channels in seven different languages across India. The show focused primarily on thirteen different but pertinent and sensitive issues prevailing in the Indian Society - female foeticide, child sex abuse, medical malpractice, honour killings, insensitivity towards the physically disabled, domestic violence, overuse of pesticides leading to pesticide poisoning, alcoholism, untouchability and plight of senior citizen and water crises. After taking one complete year for the *Satyamev Jayate* team to collect all the data pertaining in the country about all the thirteen issues to be covered, the first episode was broadcasted on 6 May 2012.

The basic ideology followed by the timeline of the *Satyamev Jayate* was to create the awareness about the thirteen issues at every pace and not only to showcase the problems but also to give solutions to them. Aamir Khan being the host of the show introduced the topic in the beginning of every show and beautifully weaved the different aspects of the issue. The show not only included the research conducted by the team but also brought human touch by sharing the stories of the victims or the survivors. Various experts were called on stage to share their view points as well as reflect the existing scenario in the country. *Satyamev Jayate* turned into a huge turn over in Television industry with the insights given on the Indian society and practices over the human behaviour. It pattered into the minds of the people and also served as a distinct platform to disseminate messages. The famous Bollywood actor Aamir Khan played the role of a facilitator to loop the different jigs of social issue which included the real stories called as *aap beti*, expertise talks, current statistics, loopholes in the mindset or at policy level, solution to the problem and the closure song. The balance of problem and the solution can be seen in this show along with the emotional touch maintained.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The impact of media in our lives is something which we cannot question due to the immense media exposure. Different modes of media have different degrees of impact and amongst all the modes television can be called as the most persuasive medium. It is like the environment pollution, in fast growing urban centres, that it is everywhere, yet invisible (Bhasin, 1984). Television alone as a mass communication tool is of huge importance and definitely has tremendous impact in forming public opinion or consensus by adding the edutainment value to any message. The different television shows leave a certain degree of impact on viewers depending upon the treatment of the message. Nowadays the reality shows have become a vital part of the television as well as of people due to the fact that they provide real issues with real situations. The real issues focusing on the real characters bring the feeling of relation with the characters. With the population of over 400 million individual television viewers and a bunch of channels offering huge number of options reality shows which deviates out attention and pain towards the situation/ pain of the others. The youth have a variety of channels and genres to choose from which includes reality shows dealing with games, music, dance, dating, friendship and some other sensitive issues. When there are huge number of popular reality based television shows understanding viewer's perspectives, itself can provide us with interesting insights.

This research is an attempt to study the general perceptions about the show and to understand the possible impact such talk shows can have on the mind sets of people in bringing about sensitivity towards various social issues.

OBJECTIVES

The study was conducted with the following objectives:

- To study the perception of viewers regarding selected episodes of *Satyamev Jayate* - a reality based talk show.
- To undertake a detailed content analysis of the selected episodes in terms of the genre, style of narration and potential of engaging the audience.
- To study the profile of the respondents selected for the research.

METHODOLOGY

Stratified random sampling was done. Sample comprised of 80 respondents comprising of 40 males and 40 females from the national capital of Delhi/NCR. The study was conducted in phases. In the first phase, detailed content analysis of the three episodes, focusing primarily on women issues was done. During this phase the key focus was on doing a detailed analysis of the profile of the reality show - *Satyamev Jayate* and its three gender based episodes. In the second phase, demographic profile of the respondents was taken and analysis of their tele-viewing pattern was done.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Profiling Satyamev Jayate

Satyamev Jayate, a reality based talk show was aired on Star Plus and Doordarshan. The show was meant for the general audience. Out of the thirteen episodes, the following three episodes focusing on women issues were studied in detail, female foeticide, Indian big fat wedding and domestic violence. The format of the reality show not only raised sensation but also intended to bring awareness regarding these pertinent and relatively silent issues.

The first episode titled **Female Foeticide** was aired on 6th may 2012 for duration of about an hour. It raised one of the most pinching yet ignorant problems in India- “Female Foeticide and The Skewed Sex-Ratio. As far as the episodes showcased in the show were concerned, there were about thirteen episodes which were categorized in five sub-categories (child related, gender issues, health issues, ecology based issues and issue of untouchability) and the respondents were asked to choose episodes they have watched based on their understanding of these issues. It was found that majority of the male (83%) and female respondents (80%) felt that all the issues were covered in the episodes. However, interestingly both men and women could co-relate to the gender issues being focused in majority of the episodes as compared to the rest four issues.

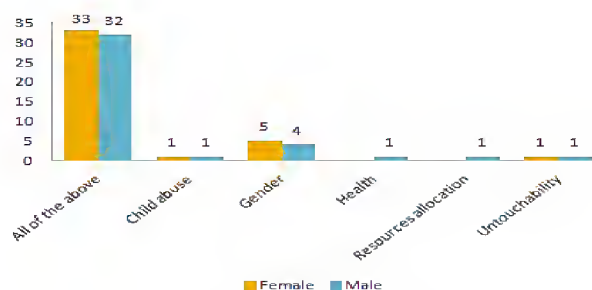


Figure 1: (Categorization of the Episodes by the Respondents)

In order to measure reach and publicity of the show, respondents were asked whether they watched *Satyamev Jayate* show or not. It came out that majority of the female respondents (98%) as well as the male respondents

(95%) had watched the show. Findings also revealed the tools for effective marketing of *Satyamev Jayate*. Television proved to be the most effective tool for marketing the show covering 65% of the sample size (65% female & 65% male). After Television, the most potential marketing tool that worked was the print media amongst females (25%) and word of mouth (15%) amongst males. With the basic assumption that all the respondents couldn't have watched all the show, it became mandatory to know the number of shows they've watched in total. It was found that the majority (32%) of the female respondents managed to watch 7-9 episodes of *Satyamev Jayate* whereas male respondents watched 4-6 episodes (30%). In response to the question enquiring whether *Satyamev Jayate* can be qualified as a reality based talk show, it was found that majority (93%) of the respondents, categorized *Satyamev Jayate* as a reality based talk show. Out of this figure, 95% respondents of women and 90% respondents were men.

PHASE

Profile of the Respondents

In the second phase, information was obtained from respondents regarding their age, education, marital status, occupation and the zone they fall in, using questionnaires. The total sample size ($N = 80$) was divided into the equal number of respondents ($n_1 = 40$ males and $n_2 = 40$ females) of urban Delhi. Respondents fell in the age group of 20-35 years. According to the responses obtained, it was found that 43% of the people who participated in the study were from East region, followed by 30% from West, 27% from South and only 23% from North Delhi. Further, it was found that the majority of the respondents (63%) belonged to the age group of 20-25 years. As far as their marital status was concerned, it was found that most of them (66%) were unmarried. Regarding the educational qualification, it came out that amongst the female respondents, majority of them (65%) were post graduates while amongst the male respondents' majority (63%) had only completed their graduation. Based on the responses received, it was found that majority (55%) of them were salaried professionals.

Tele-Viewing Pattern of the Respondents & Their Preferences

For the purpose of the study, studying the viewership pattern of the respondents was important in order to understand the extent to which Television was consumed to seek information or entertainment. It was equally important to gain insights into the program genres preferred by the respondents. According to the responses attained, it was found that almost all the respondents (95%) used television to get the information and for entertainment value and watched *Satyamev Jayate* for similar reasons. Regarding the type of TV genres, it was found that the majority of the women respondents watched reality based television show whereas majority of male respondents watched news. Understanding the preferences of the program genres, it was found that amongst the various genres of the reality show, majority of males and females preferred watching Talk Shows followed by the dance shows and lifestyle fashions shows.

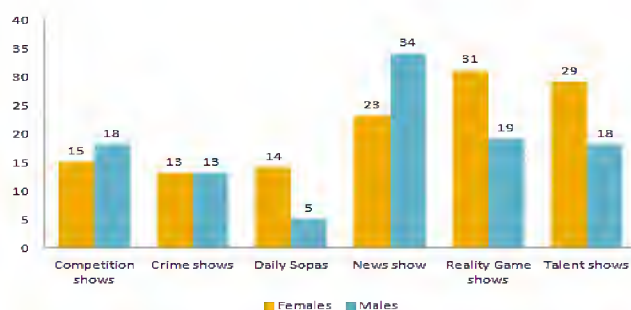


Figure 2: Tele-Viewing Pattern of the Respondents & Their Preferences

Part of Satyamev Jayate Liked by the Respondents

In order to understand the demands of the viewers or the end receivers it was important to study the format they liked the most. The majority of both males and females liked the *aap biti* (stories) the most and the second most liked part of the show by the females were the expert comments and song at the end of the show which denotes that only the content doesn't matters alone, also the music adds emotional touch to it. And the second most part liked by the males was the videos shown along with the Aamir Khan's unique style of presenting the show and the issue.

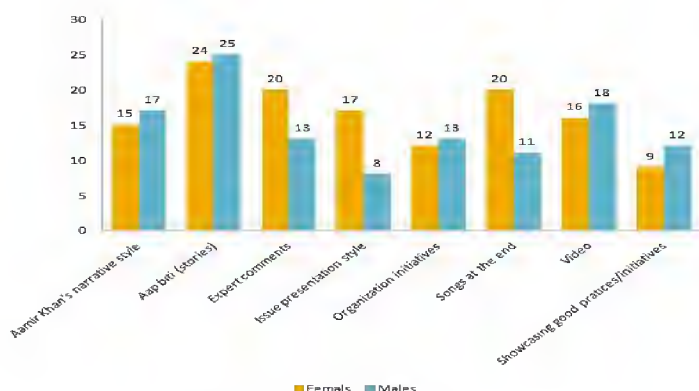


Figure 3: Part of Satyamev Jayate Liked by the Respondents

Respondent's Favourite Episode

It was found that of the total sample (N=80) 43% of the male respondents and 60% of the female respondents watched all the three female focused episodes in the show. And as there were wide range of social issues covered in various episodes broadcasted highlighting the dark side of the society. From the bar graph given above, it can be concluded that 20% men and 40% women responded to the episode on Female Foeticide as their most favourite episode. The second most favourite episode amongst women was the episode on domestic violence and amongst men it was the episode on child sex abuse.

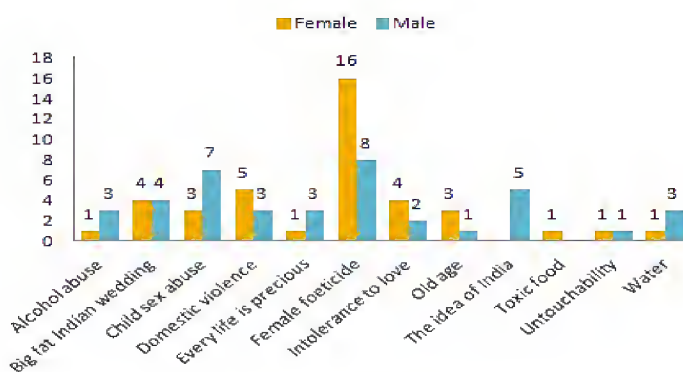


Figure 4: Respondent's Favourite Episode

Viewership of the Three Female Focussed Episodes

This question was asked basically to understand the viewing pattern of the selected three episodes of the show. From the bar graph shown below it can be concluded that the majority of the males and females were able to watch all the three female focused episodes being raised in the show. At an individual level, majority of the respondents were able to watch the very first episode which was on Female Foeticide.

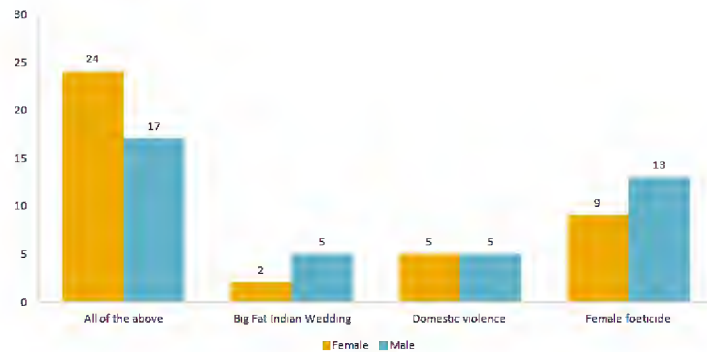


Figure 5: Viewership of the Three Female Focussed Episodes

Amount of Change Brought by the Show

In order to understand the role of reality talk show – *Satyamev Jayate* to act as a potential catalyst to bring about change in the mindsets of the people, it was analysed that of the 40 female respondents, 28 females (79%) somewhere or the other noticed change in their ideology and lifestyle after watching the show. Further majority of the men (53%) also reported similar changes in their thinking towards these existing problems.

Role of Celebrity as a Channel of Disseminating Information

During the study respondents were enquired to identify the impact of celebrity becoming a channel for disseminating sensitive information on issues like female foeticide, abuse and violence etc. It came out from the study that majority of the female respondents (80%) would have watched the show even if there would have been any other celebrity hosting the show whereas, the percentage dropped to 63% in males. This clearly indicates the strong preference for a television celebrity in hosting reality based talk shows to disseminate such sensitive information adding another evidence to the use of celebrities as a channel of communication.

Preference for More Such Programs to be Aired on National Television

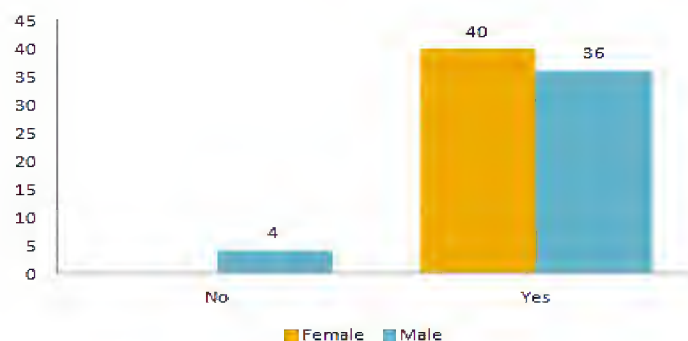


Figure 6: Preference for More Such Programs

From the above chart it can be concluded that majority of the respondents (95%) believed there should be more such shows telecasted on television sparing only 5% of the respondents who disagree using television as a potential medium to discuss such issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis of responses of a selected set of respondents, following recommendations can be made about reality based shows:-

- Each episode of *Satyamev Jayate* aired on television had a lot of information for viewers. Absorbing entire content in one single episode is an impossible task for any human. This has been even backed by the survey results mentioned in the initial sections. None of the respondents remembered 100% of the topics discussed during 90mins of the show.
- One recommendation, which came from our respondents, says that limited NGOs were linked with the concept. This has restricted the spread of the cause. If more organizations were linked, it would have led to more penetration and the density of reach would have increased.
- Another observation made, was the negative image of Women in India. Viewers of the television have lately developed an image about Indian women, who perceive them as weaker members of the society. This image needs to be revamped with help of media, if change is to be brought.

CONCLUSIONS

Study reported that majority (93%) of the respondents categorised *Satyamev Jayate* as reality based talk show. Of the total, 95% respondents were women and 90% respondents were men. Further, majority of the male (87%) and female (95%) respondents agree that the *Satyamev Jayate* is the right platform to showcase such social issues. Almost all the respondents reported the need to telecast such shows on the national television.

It can be also be concluded from the study that majority of both males and females liked the aap biti (stories) the most and the second most liked part of the show by the females were the expert comments and song at the end of the show which denotes that only the content doesn't matter, music also lends an emotional touch. The second most liked part by the male respondents was the videos shown along with the Aamir Khan's unique style of presenting the show and the issue. Reinforcing the cultivation theory of mass media it can be concluded that television as a medium has immense potential to initiate and promote change in the society.

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